



Comprehension

Genre

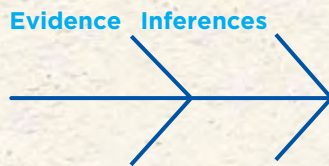
A **Short Story** is a brief work of fiction that describes a limited number of characters and a central event.



Generate Questions

Make Inferences

As you read, use your Inference Diagram.



Read to Find Out

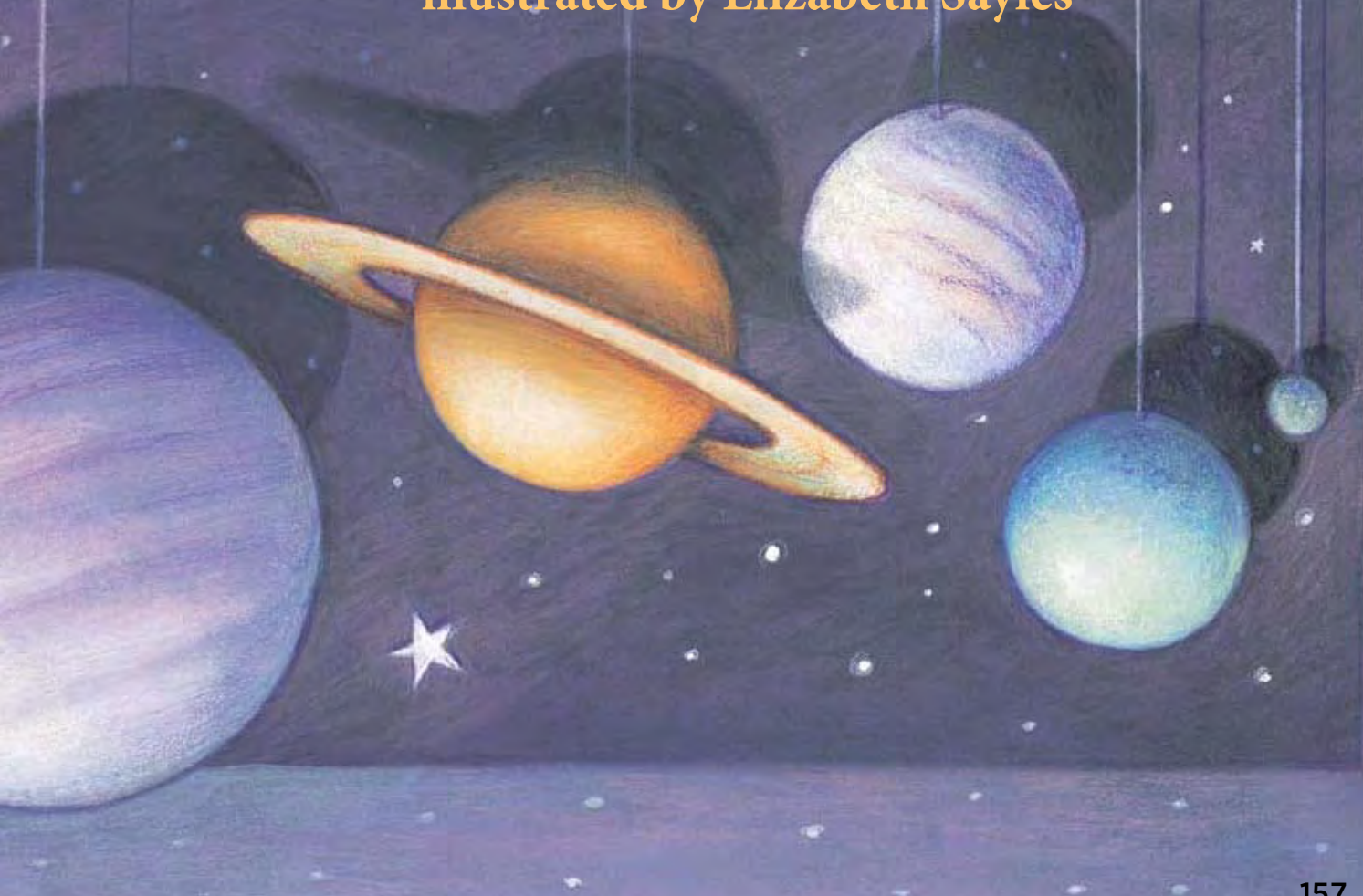
How does Harriet feel about Mars?

The Night of the Pomegranate



by Tim Wynne-Jones

illustrated by Elizabeth Sayles



Harriet's solar system was a mess. She had made it—the sun and its nine planets—out of rolled-up balls of the morning newspaper. It was mounted on a sheet of green bristol board. The bristol board had a project about Austria on the other side. Harriet wished the background were black. Green was all wrong.

Everything about her project was wrong. The crumpled paper was coming **undone**. Because she had used the last of the tape on Saturn's rings, the three remaining planets had nothing to keep them scrunched up. Tiny Pluto was already bigger than Jupiter and growing by the minute. She had also run out of glue, so part of her solar system was stuck together with grape chewing gum.

Harriet's big brother, Tom, was annoyed at her because Mom had made him drive her to school early with her stupid project. Dad was annoyed at her for using part of the business section. Mostly she had stuck to the want ads, but then an advertisement printed in red ink in the business section caught her eye, and she just had to have it for Mars. Harriet had a crush on Mars; that's what Tom said. She didn't even mind his saying it.

Mars was near the earth this month. The nights had been November cold but clear as glass, and Harriet had been out to see Mars every night, which was why she hadn't gotten her solar system finished, why she was so tired, why Mom made Tom drive her to school. It was all Mars's fault.





She was using the tape on Ms. Krensky's desk when Clayton Beemer arrived with his dad. His solar system came from the hobby store. The planets were Styrofoam balls, all different sizes and painted the right colors. Saturn's rings were clear plastic painted over as delicately as insect wings.

Harriet looked at her own Saturn. Her rings were drooping despite all the tape. They looked like a limp skirt on a . . . on a ball of scrunched-up newspaper.

Harriet sighed. The wires that supported Clayton's planets in their black box were almost invisible. The planets seemed to float.

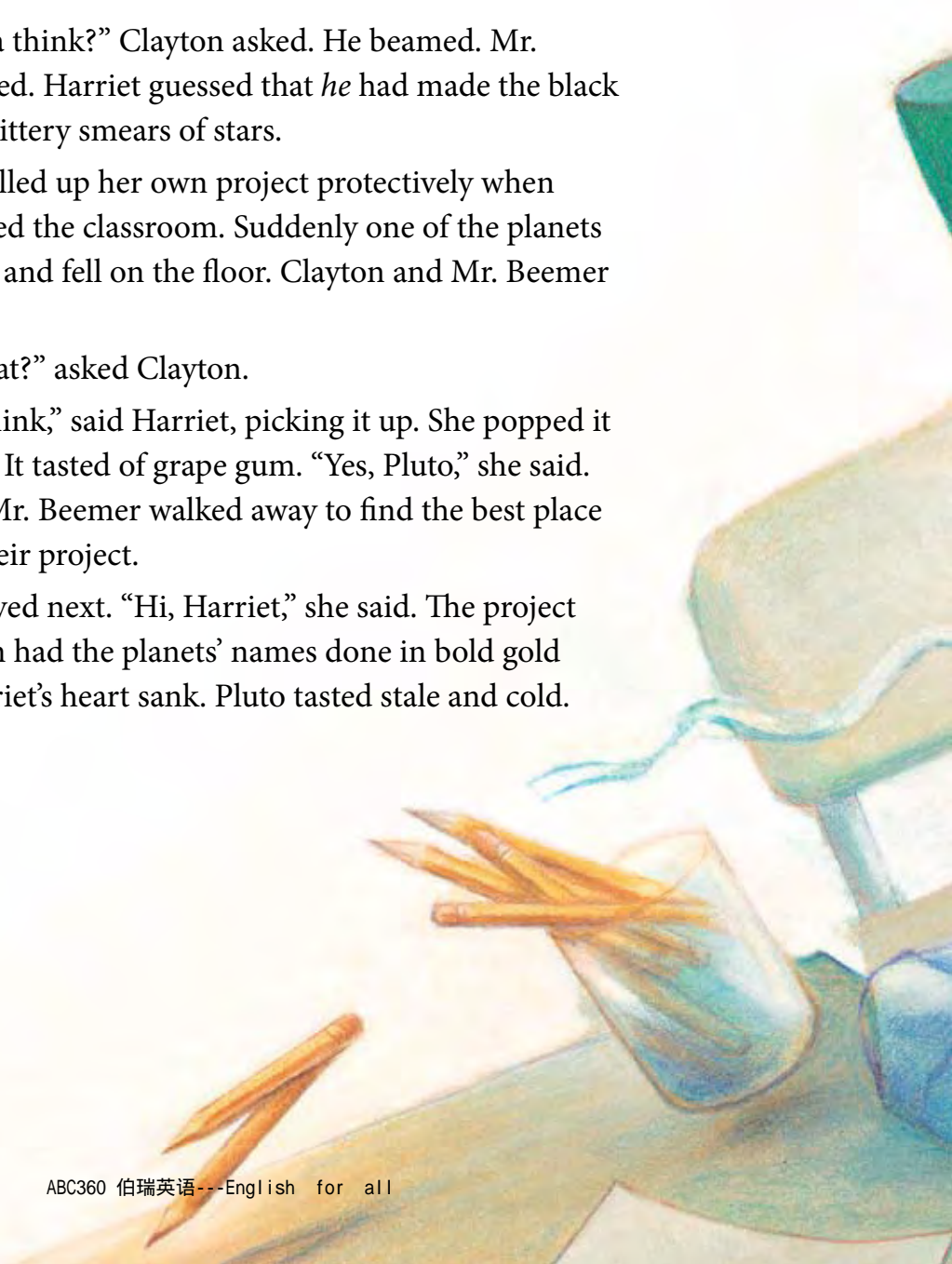
"What d'ya think?" Clayton asked. He beamed. Mr. Beemer beamed. Harriet guessed that *he* had made the black box with its glittery smears of stars.

She had rolled up her own project protectively when Clayton entered the classroom. Suddenly one of the planets came unstuck and fell on the floor. Clayton and Mr. Beemer looked at it.

"What's that?" asked Clayton.

"Pluto, I think," said Harriet, picking it up. She popped it in her mouth. It tasted of grape gum. "Yes, Pluto," she said. Clayton and Mr. Beemer walked away to find the best place to show off their project.

Darjit arrived next. "Hi, Harriet," she said. The project under her arm had the planets' names done in bold gold lettering. Harriet's heart sank. Pluto tasted stale and cold.





But last night Harriet had tasted pomegranates. Old Mrs. Pond had given her one while she busied herself putting on layer after layer of warm clothing and gathering the things they would need for their Mars watch.

Mrs. Pond lived in the country. She lived on the edge of the woods by a meadow that sloped down to a marsh through rough frost-licked grass and prickly ash and juniper. It was so much darker than town; good for stargazing.

By 11:00 P.M. Mars was directly above the marsh, which was where Harriet and Mrs. Pond set themselves up for their **vigil**. They found it just where they had left it the night before: in the constellation Taurus between the Pleiades and the Hyades. But you didn't need a map to find Mars these nights. It shone like rust, neither trembling nor twinkling as the fragile stars did.

Mrs. Pond smiled and handed Harriet two folding chairs. "Ready?" she asked.







“Ready, class?” said Ms. Krensky. Everyone took their seats. Harriet placed the green bristol board universe in front of her. It was an even worse mess than it had been when she arrived. Her solar system was **ravaged**.

It had started off with Pluto and then, as a joke to make Darjit laugh, she had eaten Neptune. Then Karen had come in, and Jodi and Nick and Scott.

“The planet taste test,” Harriet had said, ripping off a bit of Mercury. “Umm, very **spicy**.” By the time the bell rang, there wasn’t much of her project left.

Kevin started. He stood at the back of the classroom holding a green and blue marble.

“If this was earth,” he said, “then the sun would be this big—” He put the earth in his pocket and pulled a fat squishy yellow beach ball from a garbage bag. Everybody hooted and clapped. “And it would be at the crosswalk,” he added. Everyone looked confused, so Ms. Krensky helped Kevin explain the relative distances between the earth and the sun. “And Pluto would be fifty miles away from here,” said Kevin. But then he wasn’t sure about that, so Ms. Krensky worked it out at the board with him.

Meanwhile, using Kevin’s example, the class was supposed to figure out where other planets in the solar system would be relative to the green and blue marble in Kevin’s pocket. Harriet sighed.



Until last night, Harriet had never seen the inside of a pomegranate before. As she opened the hard rind, she **marveled** at the bright red seeds in their cream-colored fleshy pouches.

“It’s like a little secret universe all folded in on itself,” said Mrs. Pond.

Harriet tasted it. With her tongue, she popped a little red bud against the roof of her mouth. The taste startled her, made her laugh.

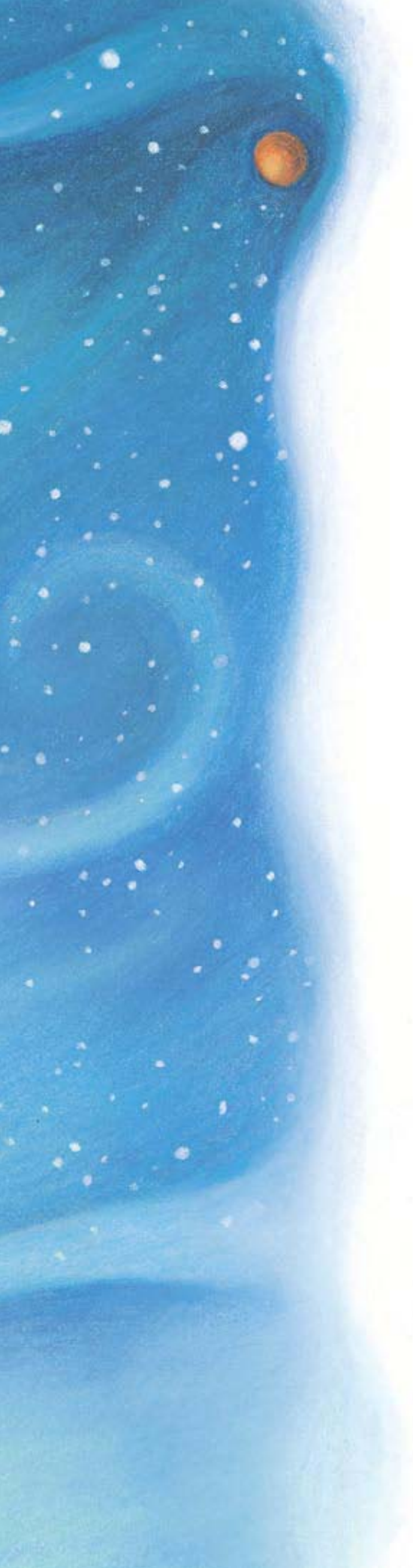
“Tonight,” Mrs. Pond said, “Mars is only forty-five million miles away.” They drank a cocoa toast to that. Then she told Harriet about another time when Mars had been even closer on its orbit around the sun. She had been a girl then, and had heard on the radio the famous **broadcast** of *The War of the Worlds*. An actor named Orson Welles had made a radio drama based on a story about Martians attacking the world, but he had presented it in a series of news bulletins and reports, and a lot of people had believed it was true.

Harriet listened to Mrs. Pond and sipped her cocoa and stared at the earth’s closest neighbor and felt deliciously chilly and warm at the same time. Mars was wonderfully clear in the telescope, but even with the naked eye she could imagine canals and raging storms. She knew there weren’t really Martians, but she allowed herself to imagine them, anyway. She imagined one of them preparing for his invasion of the earth, packing his laser, a thermos of cocoa, and a folding chair.









“What in heaven’s name is this?” Ms. Krensky was standing at Harriet’s chair, staring down at the green bristol board. There was only one planet left.

“Harriet says it’s Mars,” Darjit started giggling.

“And how big is Mars?” asked Ms. Krensky. Her eyes said **Unsatisfactory**.

“Compared to Kevin’s marble earth, Mars would be the size of a pomegranate seed, including the juicy red pulp,” said Harriet. Ms. Krensky walked to the front of the class. She turned at her desk. Was there the hint of a smile on her face?

“And where is it?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

Harriet looked at the **calculations** she had done on a corner of the green bristol board. “If the sun was at the crosswalk,” said Harriet, “then Mars would be much closer. Over there.” She pointed out the window at the slide in the kindergarten playground. Some of the class actually looked out the window to see if they could see it.

“You *can* see Mars,” said Harriet. “Sometimes.” Now she was sure she saw Ms. Krensky smile.

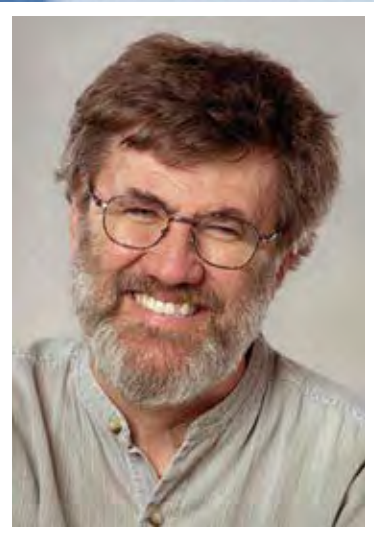
“How many of you have seen Mars?” the teacher asked. Only Harriet and Randy Pilcher put up their hands. But Randy had only seen it on a movie.

“Last night was a special night, I believe,” said Ms. Krensky, crossing her arms and leaning against her desk. Harriet nodded. “Tell us about it, Harriet,” said the teacher.

So Harriet did. She told them all about Mrs. Pond and the Mars watch. She started with the pomegranate.



Out of This World with Tim Wynne-Jones



Tim Wynne-Jones was first an artist, but he was always thinking of the story behind the picture. He knew he was a writer, too, when he began to write in the margins of pictures he was drawing. For the volume in which this story appears, Tim won an award in Canada, where he lives. He wrote it for middle-grades, which he considers an “extraordinary age group.” Tim enjoys mixing images with stories; he has even written the libretto, or words, for an opera, as well as a musical for children.



Find out more about
Tim Wynne-Jones at
www.macmillanmh.com

Author's Purpose

Tim Wynne-Jones's purpose for this short story was to entertain. Does having Mrs. Pond unexpectedly assist Harriet help the author achieve his purpose? Explain.



Comprehension Check

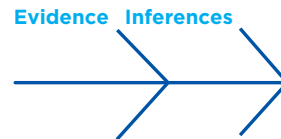
Summarize

Summarize “The Night of the Pomegranate.”
Why is Harriet’s project initially such a mess?
How do the flashback sections help you to understand Harriet’s fascination with Mars?

Think and Compare



1. What evidence in the text can you find that Ms. Krensky will excuse the poor quality of Harriet’s project? Use your Inferences Diagram to help answer the question.



Generate Questions: Make Inferences

2. Harriet blames the “Mars watch” **vigil** for the fact that her project is unfinished and poorly done. Do you think her excuse is valid? Explain. **Analyze**
3. Think about a time when you had to do a project for school. What made it successful? Compare and contrast your experience with Harriet’s. **Evaluate**
4. Do you think space exploration is important? Explain your answer. **Evaluate**
5. Read “The Night of the Northern Lights” on pages 154-155. How does Tyrell experience a turning point similar to Harriet’s in “The Night of the Pomegranate?” Compare the lessons that each of the characters learned. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**